

June 17, 1953

**Report from V. Semenov and A. Grechko
(Berlin-Karlshorst) to V. Molotov and N. Bulgannin**

Citation:

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Summary:

The report is about the situation in Berlin towards the close of 16 June. The initial reason for the construction workers protesting was the raising of the output quotas in the Berlin construction industry.

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Russian

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OPERATIONS DIVISION,
MAIN OPERATIONS ADMINISTRATION,
GENERAL STAFF OF THE SOVIET ARMY

Top Secret (Declassified)

To Comrade V.M. MOLOTOV
To Comrade N.A. BULGANIN

We are reporting on the situation in Berlin towards the close of 16 June.

As reported before, there had been a demonstration by construction workers on strike in the downtown of the Soviet Sector of Berlin during the first half of 16 June, protesting against the raising of the output quotas in the Berlin construction industry. Some people from West Berlin took part in the rally. The majority of construction workers started breaking up after it was announced that SED CC had cancelled the rise in output quotas. The participation of the persons sent from West Berlin kept increasing in the subsequent gatherings.

The situation in the city worsened towards the evening of 16 June. While the activists of the SED were meeting in Friedrichsstadtpalast, big crowds started arriving from West [Berlin] into East Berlin, moving towards the above-mentioned building. At the same time, a band of up to 2,000 people, mainly West Berliners, were throwing stones at the I.V. Stalin monument at Stalinallee at 9.30 p.m. and moved towards Friedrichsstadtpalast, ransacking a shop on the way. Four hundred German (Eastern German) policemen dispersed this band. At the same time, large groups of West Berliners were attempting to promote chaos, blocking streets, holding up tram traffic, turning over cars, breaking shop windows. About 500 bandits tried to burst into the gas plant and block its operations. Some groups gathered at the Berlin City Railway Office, as well as near the SED CC building. Some hooligans tried breaking into the residential flats of SED activists at Berzarin Platz. All those groups were dispersed by German police. 25 people were arrested, according to incomplete information.

The organizers of the riots announced that there would be a meeting at Strausberger Platz in central Berlin at 6.00 a.m. on 17 June. At the same time, there was strong agitation for a general strike in East Berlin. The workers at "Fortschritt One" and "Fortschritt Two" clothing factories, as well as the night shift of 120 people at one of the Berlin plants, went on strike in the evening of 16 June.

The issue of Der Abend published in Western Berlin on the evening of 16 June [which] called for a general strike in East Berlin on 17 June. It is clear from the reports of West German press and radio that the above-mentioned hostile actions have been organized from West Berlin as a response to the recently declared measures on normalization of the political situation in the GDR. From reports, it is also clear that this is a matter of a rather major planned provocation.

We talked with the GDR leaders ULBRICHT, GROTEWOHL, and ZAISSER. They all believed that the riots of 16 June were just the beginning of actions which have been organized from West Berlin. The friends [East German leadership] are considering the probability of even larger disorders on the morning of 17 June. They made the decision to introduce police patrols to the streets where riots took place as well as to strengthen the protection of the most important objects in the city by the German People's Police. ZAISSER, Minister of State Security and Politburo member, has been

put in charge of maintaining order in the city. Units of the barracked police totaling 1,100 men are being called from Oranienburg and Potsdam to reinforce the Berlin metropolitan police forces. Measures have been taken to rally the party and youth activists to carry out explanatory work among inhabitants and to assist the authorities with maintaining order in the city.

At the request of the German friends, we are beginning troop patrols of 450 men [total] in cars in areas where disorders have occurred and also near the important installations in East Berlin.

We have agreed with the "friends" that the German People's Police will maintain order in the city and that Soviet troops will take active part in keeping order only in exceptional circumstances of extreme need. Colonel-General Comrade GRECHKO has taken the overall responsibility over Soviet troops in Berlin. Marshal GOVOROV⁴⁴ is also in Berlin.

The reports of the further events are to follow.

SEMENOV GRECHKO [...]